

**Gods and Heroes of the Maya**  
*Grades 6-12*

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**Teacher Note:**

Please make photocopies of the viewing guide for each student and bring the guides along with pens or pencils to the videoconference.

## **Teacher Information Guide**

The Cleveland Museum of Art Distance Learning Program

### **Gods and Heroes of the Maya**

*Grades 6-12*

#### **Series Objectives:**

1. Students will learn the characteristics of myth and understand how culture is revealed through the stories it tells.
2. Students will be introduced to the cultural and historical context of selected works of art and learn how art can tell a story.
3. Critical Attribute Lesson -- Students will be introduced to the characteristics of mythology and learn that ancient myths, legends, and stories:
  - can tell of natural events
  - can explain the creation of the world
  - are often fictional, and often meant to entertain
  - can explain ancient religion
  - can tell us about history
  - usually include gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines
  - sometimes teach moral lessons

#### **Program Objectives:**

- Students will learn and understand the cultural aspects of Mesoamerican society.
- Students will learn how works of art depict the gods and heroes discussed.

#### **National Education Standards:**

*For Fine Arts - Visual Arts (grades 5-8, 9-12):*

- Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures
- Making Connections Between Visual Arts and Other Disciplines

*For Language Arts - English (grades K-12):*

- Reading for Perspective
- Reading for Understanding
- Evaluation Strategies

- Communication Skills
- Communication Strategies
- Applying Knowledge
- Developing Research Skills
- Multicultural Understanding

*For Social Sciences – World History (grades 5-12):*

- Era 2: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE
- Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires 1000 BCE-300 CE
- Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE

### **Program Description:**

By examining the museum's Mesoamerican collection, students will learn about myths and stories of the Maya civilization and how the Maya used art to transmit cultural ideas. Students will also understand how modern scholars piece together Maya history by studying these works of art. The Maya creation story, which includes the tales of the Hero Twins and the great Maya ballgame, will be the primary focus of the lesson.

### **Prerequisites for Videoconference:**

1. View the video *Popol Vuh* by Patricia Amlin, W. A. Palmer Films, 1989 (available in the Cleveland Public Library, Cleveland State University, or you can watch it online here - [http://123movies.info/biography/Amlin,\\_Patricia](http://123movies.info/biography/Amlin,_Patricia)). The *Popol Vuh* is the creation story of the Maya people and provides a wonderful background for the lesson. A brief re-telling of selections from the *Popol Vuh* will be included in the distance learning lesson in order to acquaint the students with the main ideas.
2. Have the students read a Greco-Roman myth such as the Labors of Hercules. A good source is: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/labors.html> Discuss in class or in small groups the differences in the Hercules (or other Greek) myth and the *Popol Vuh* narrative.
3. Using a map, review the countries of Mesoamerica to familiarize students with these areas. Students should be aquatinted with basic information such as staple crops, climate, animals in the environment, etc. about Maya lands--Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, and Honduras.

**Vocabulary:**

*These words may be used in the distance learning lesson.*

**Anthropomorphic** – described as possessing human characteristics. This can refer to other animals, objects, deities, or even ideas which appear to have human traits.

**Cosmology** – thoughts and beliefs about the nature of the universe.

**Deity** – a god or goddess.

**Maize** – corn, a dietary staple of the Maya; also one of the Maya's most important deities, who was the First Father of humankind and provider of sustenance.

**Mesoamerica** – region that included parts of Mexico and Central America. "Meso" means middle.

**Mesoamerican ballgame** – a group of games played by the ancient Americans, which had religious significance (known as *pitz* by the Maya, in Spanish it is known as *juego de pelota*, and the Aztecs called it *ōllamalitzli*, which is sometimes spelled *ullamalitzli*.) Today there is a modern version of the game known as *ullama*.

**Moral** – lesson or advice contained in a story

**Palma** – an object shaped like the frond of a palm tree and used to protect the chest while playing the Mesoamerican ballgame.

**Popol Vuh** – a collection of songs and stories written by the Maya people, and passed down orally from ancient times. The text tells of the origins of the universe, the struggles of the gods, and the creation of humanity, with themes that are central to the Maya worldview. A Dominican friar named Francisco Ximénez, recorded the Popul Vuh in Spanish at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, translated from the original K'iche' (Quiché), an ancient Mayan language.

**Quetzal** – a Central American bird with brilliant golden-green and red feathers.

**Stela** – a free-standing stone slab, carved on one or more faces.

**Supernatural** – unexplainable or divine forces exceeding known natural powers.

**Underworld** – a mythical and threatening world below the surface of the earth.

**Yoke** – a protective device worn around the hips during the Mesoamerican ballgame.

**Yucatan Peninsula** – a landmass extending into the Gulf of Mexico.

**Zoomorphic** – a figure or object which has animal characteristics.

## **Post-lesson Activities:**

### **Activity One**

Create your own zoomorphic (having animal characteristics) being in a drawing or a mask.

Materials needed: Paper, colored pencils, scissors

Process:

1. Students should each select three Mesoamerican animals that interest them which could be used to describe themselves. For example, jaguars are often considered to be fierce and strong. Snakes in Mesoamerican culture are both revered and feared. Other animals described by the Maya are bats, vultures, catfish, monkeys, scorpions, iguanas, toads and ants.
2. Ask students, “What parts of your animals will you include for your mask from the different parts of the head or body of the animals you selected? Will the pelt of the jaguar be combined with the eyes of the snake to show that you are both strong and should be honored? If so, try to draw them. Then add your third animal’s body part.” Students can draw their masks or actually create them using papier maché. Here are some websites with directions for using papier mache:

[http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/The\\_power\\_of\\_masks.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/The_power_of_masks.pdf)

<http://www.my-ecoach.com/resources/masks/maskmaking.html>

<http://familycrafts.about.com/cs/papermache/a/051500pm.htm>

<http://familycrafts.about.com/library/projects/blpmchface.htm>

[http://www.dltk-kids.com/type/how\\_to\\_paper\\_mache.htm](http://www.dltk-kids.com/type/how_to_paper_mache.htm)

### **Activity Two**

Write a story based on an art object.

Materials needed: Paper, pens, information about the painted vase from the distance learning lesson, image: Vessel with Ballplayer; 600-1000 CE. (included in packet or online)

Remind students about the Vessel with Ballplayer:

Painted pottery played an important ritual role in Maya society. Vessels such as these were used as containers for sacred chocolate drinks, were given as gifts, and also used to accompany the deceased on their journey into the Underworld.

Many of these painted vessels depict various mythological scenes featuring natural and supernatural beings interacting with each other.

This vessel depicts a ballplayer diving to get ball that flies in front of his face. He wears a yoke, like the one we saw in the lesson. He’s also attended by dwarfs, which indicates that the vase represents a ceremony involving the game, not a real game. This is also evident by the elaborate headdress the figure wears.

Process: A good story has a beginning, middle and an end. The beginning is called the introduction, the middle is the body of the story and the end is the conclusion.

Divide your paper into three parts by folding it horizontally to form the three sections. Label the top section as the introduction, the middle as the body and the bottom part as the conclusion. As you think about your story, take notes and put them into one of the three sections. You now have the bulk of your story finished! On a separate sheet of paper use your notes to write your story out in sentence form.

### **Activity Three**

Develop a Creation Myth for an imaginary culture.

Materials needed: Writing materials, research materials. Optional: original drawings and/or costumes created by members of each group.

Process:

1. Divide class into three or four groups.
2. Explain the assignment as follows: "This assignment has several components. Each group will be creating its own imaginary culture, but it is to be based on the culture of the Maya people.

The goal is to write your own creation story using the geographical and cultural features of areas inhabited by the Maya. Some details you might include in your imaginary culture are animals, physical features, such as mountains, plant life, etc. of the region.

You should select a name for your group, considering what you have noticed about some of the Mesoamerican names mentioned in the videoconference. In addition, create gods and heroes that will be the protagonists of your creation myth. These characters should have names that are also based on what you heard in the story of the HeroTwins. Your creation myth should have a moral that teaches or explains something to the people who hear the story. It should also reflect the values of your society. For other features of the creation myth, refer to your viewing guide for aspects of your main characters such as quests, special powers and other characteristics."

Each group should be prepared to present their creation myth to the rest of the class. This could be done as a telling of the story followed by discussion, a power point presentation or a skit. Imaginative costumes and original drawings could be used to enhance the presentation.

## **Teacher Resources:**

### **Print Resources**

Baquetdane, Elizabeth. *Eyewitness Books – Aztec, Inca and Maya*. New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc., 1993.

Barbier, Jean Paul. *A Guide to Pre-Columbian Art*. New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1998.

Baudez, Claude and Picasso, Sydney. *The Lost Cities of the Maya*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1987.

*A Coloring Book of Incas, Aztecs and Mayas*. Santa Barbara: Bellerophon Books, 1989.

Coe, Michael D. *The Maya*. 6th ed. New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1999.

Crosher, Judith. *Technology in the Time of the Maya*. Hove, East Sussex: Wayland Publishers, Ltd, 1997.

Ferguson, Diana. *Tales of the Plumed Serpent*. London: Collins & Brown Limited, 2000

Fisher, Leonard Everett. *Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Maya*. New York: Holiday House, 1999.

Freidel, David., et al., *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path*. New York: Quill, William Morrow, 1993.

Gonzalez, Gaspar Pedro. *A Mayan Life*. Rancho Palos Verdes: YAX TE' Foundation, 1995.

Hoffman, Mary and Ray, Jane. *Sun, Moon, and Stars*. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1998.

McEwan, Colin. *Ancient Mexico in the British Museum*. London: British Museum Press, 1994.

Miller, Mary Ellen. *Maya Art and Architecture*. New York: Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1999.

Montejo, Victor. *The Bird Who Cleans the World and other Mayan Fables*. Trans. Wallace Kaufman. Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1991.

Navarrete Linares, Federico. *A Day With a Maya*. Minneapolis: Runestone Press, 1998.

Nourse Lattimore, Deborah. *Why There Is No Arguing in Heaven – A Mayan Myth*. U. States: Harper Collins Publishers, 1989.

Ruddell, Nancy. *Mystery of the Maya*. Hull, Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1995.

Sabloff, Jeremy A. *The New Archaeology and the Ancient Maya*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1990.

Taube, Karl. *Aztec and Maya Myths*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

Tedlock, Dennis. *Popol Vuh*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985.

Time-Life Books. *Lost Civilizations – The Magnificent Maya*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1993.

### **Electronic Resources**

<http://www.csuohio.edu/kinalwinik/>  
Cleveland State University

<http://penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/PDFs/54-1/who-were-the-maya.pdf>

Helpful overview of Maya early civilization.

<http://www.folkart.com/folktale/folktale.htm>  
Mayan folk tales

<http://www.civilization.ca/civil/maya/mminteng.html#menu>  
The Canadian Museum of Civilization Maya Exhibit site.

<http://www.youthbeyondborders.org/gintro.html>  
This web site is written by school-age children of the Lo de en Medio village and other villages in the Rio Dulce region of Guatemala and they describe some of their Mayan traditions.

<http://www.belizezoo.org/>  
The Belize Zoo, learn about some of Belize's most interesting animals.

Note 1: Curricular kits, binders and expedition boxes for Maya studies are available to K-12 teachers through the Cleveland State University Multimedia Center. Included in these resources are readings about Maya culture, post cards, newspapers, wooden toys, beads, maps, weavings and other artifacts. Contact the multimedia center for further information.

Note 2: Demco, Inc. has a wonderful cultural series called Past Ports. Their unit entitled Road to the Sun Gods: An Interactive Curriculum Unit for Social Studies includes lesson plans, student worksheets and activities on the Aztecs, Incas and Mayas. For more information contact: Consumer Service, Demco, Inc., 4810 Forest Run Road, Madison, Wisconsin 53707 or 1-800-356-1200.



This lesson written by Nancy Wanyerka, Cuyahoga Hts. Middle School and Frank Isphording, The Cleveland Museum of Art.

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## **Gods and Heroes of the Maya Quiz**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions taken from the Distance Learning Lesson. You can check your responses with the answer key.

1. Which of the following is a characteristic of a myth?
  - a. they verify historical accounts
  - b. they are always serious
  - c. they shun moral lessons
  - d. they tell of the creation of the world
  
2. In Maya society, snakes are
  - a. eaten as a choice delicacy in culinary circles
  - b. found in homes as pets
  - c. prized above all other animals
  - d. revered and feared
  
3. What is a metaphor?
  - a. a comparison of two or more similar ideas or objects
  - b. a planet
  - c. a comparison of two or more unrelated ideas or objects
  - d. a large vase
  
4. The El Peru stela shows the “Royal Woman of the Snake Polity” dressed as a god. Which god is portrayed in this stela?
  - a. god of maize
  - b. god of rain
  - c. god of war
  - d. god of wind
  
5. The *Popol Vuh* is:
  - a. a Mayan cartoon
  - b. a Mayan God
  - c. the Mayan creation story
  - d. an important religious event
  
6. All is true about the ancient ballgame of Mesoamerica except the following:
  - a. the game was played with a huge rubber ball
  - b. the team was made up of eleven players on a side
  - c. thick pads were worn around the waist
  - d. touching the ball with your hands was against the rules

7. A palma is
- a. an animal found in the Mesoamerican region
  - b. an offering used in religious sacrifice
  - c. a piece of ballplayer gear
  - d. a polychrome ceramic vase
8. Ancient Maya people had a system of writing called
- a. cuneiform
  - b. fresco
  - c. hieroglyphs
  - d. panache

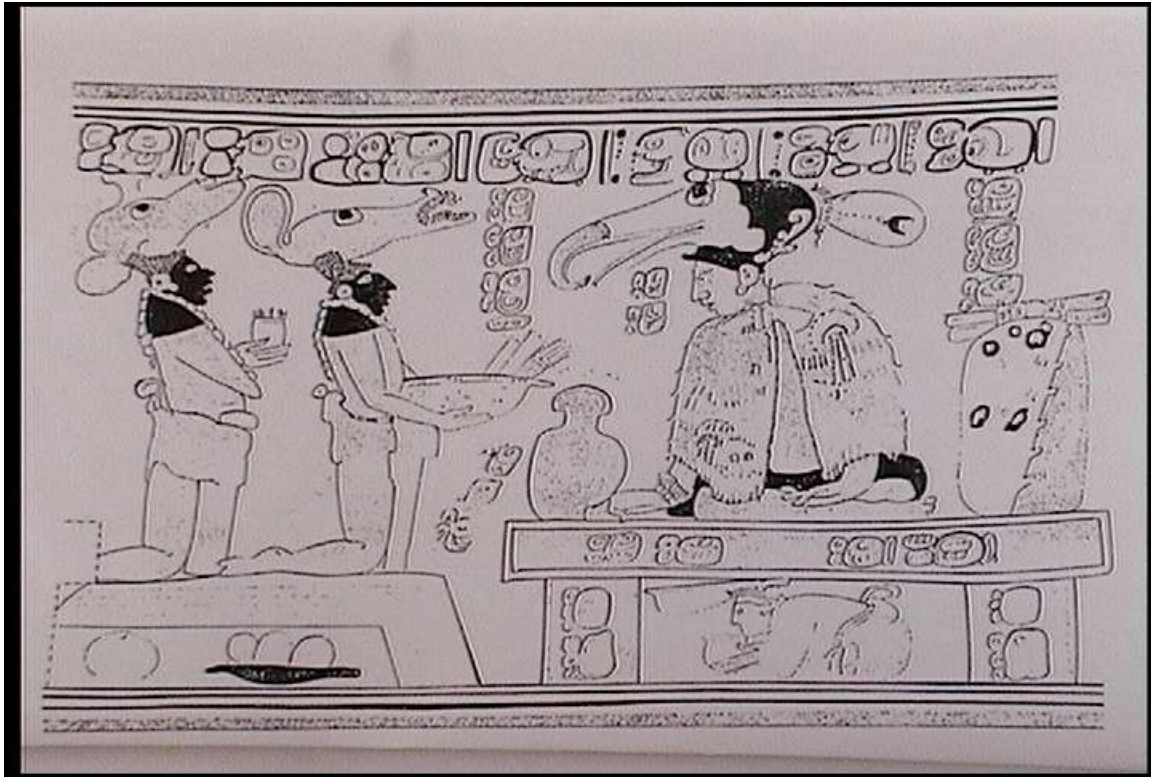
Here are the answers and explanations to the quiz.

1. d. Although myths may tell us something about history, they aren't meant to verify historical fact and are often filled with fantastic tales. Myths are not always serious; they sometimes serve as entertainments. Moral lessons are sometimes implied in the stories. The best answer is d.
2. d. Snakes are revered; that is, honored, and feared even today in Maya society.
3. c. A metaphor is a comparison of two or more unrelated ideas or objects
4. a. The "Royal Woman of the Snake Polity" dresses as the maize god, or corn god. Maize was, and still is, an important agricultural product of Mesoamerica.
5. c. The *Popol Vuh* describes the Mayan creation story
6. b. The team had between four to six players.
7. c. A palma is a piece of ballplayer gear. Ballplayers were often depicted in scenes wearing palmas, or objects shaped like palm fronds, at the waist just above the protective yokes.
8. c. The ancient Maya writing system used hieroglyphs. Although cuneiform is also an ancient writing system, it is not Mayan. Panache is a plume of feathers. Fresco is a technique of painting in wet plaster.

**Maya, Painted Vase with Ruler and Scribe 1990.181**




Late Classic Period, 600-900 A.D.

Rollout design



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## Viewing Guide

 <h1 style="text-align: center;">Gods and Heroes of the Maya</h1> <h2 style="text-align: center;">THE MYTH OF THE HERO TWINS</h2> 			
<b>Duty or quest:</b>	_____	<b>Does the story occur at the beginning of time or distant past?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Special power:</b>	_____	<b>In what ways are the hero twins human-like?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Positive trait/strength:</b>	_____	<b>In what ways are the hero twins god-like?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Negative trait/ flaw:</b>	_____	<b>What historical event is explained?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Adversary/foe:</b>	_____	<b>What natural event is explained?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Action or heroic deed:</b>	_____	<b>Does the story express a universal theme?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
<b>Outcome or reward:</b>	_____	<b>What beliefs, values or themes are passed along in this myth?</b>	_____
	_____		_____
 <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <p>I'm "lord," but if you don't draw me properly I become vulture, or excrement-head</p> </div>			
_____			
_____			
_____			

## Selected Images



Ballgame Hip Protector (Yoke) |  
1973.213  
Mexico, Gulf Coast, Classic  
Veracruz style (600-1100)



Front Face of a Stela (Free-  
standing Stone with Relief) |  
1967.29  
Guatemala, El Perú site, Maya  
style (AD 250-900)